

From Cows to Cabins: The Commodification of Ranches

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Introduction

Topic Introduction

- Ranches in British Columbia have been in transition in terms of how they gain income
- Ranches in the past were mainly supported by raising cattle and other animals
- Ranches today have various “commodified” methods to make a profit
 - Examples of methods are: cabins, birdwatching, fireside stargazing, trail rides on horseback, and other experiences that illuminate the “rural idyll”

Objectives

- To broadly introduce research on the topics of commodification and ranches with a global example
- To display how the ranch industry is important in British Columbia and the Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD)
- To show that there are stages in the commodification of ranches by introducing specific case studies of ranches within the TNRD
- To propose the idea that commodification and technology in rural ranches may be able to go too far, and a bottom-up approach should be used going further

Methods

- Literature review
- Analysis of ranch websites and their histories

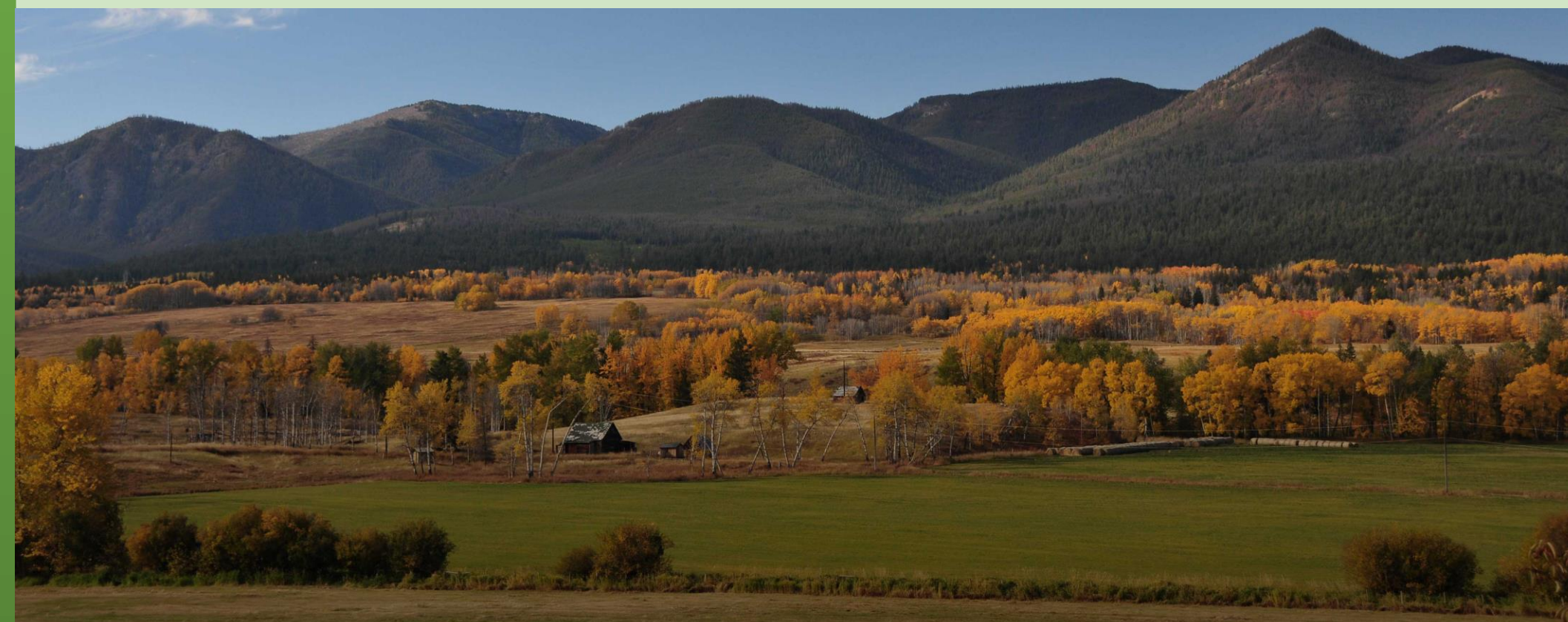


Image: Courtesy of the Thompson-Nicola Regional District

Key Terms

Rural:

- Vague, ambiguous
- Social Construct – identity with social, cultural, aesthetic, and ideological characteristics (Woods, 2005)
- Differing definitions by discipline, organization, and individual

Rural Idyll:

- An “aspirational picture of an idealized rurality, often emphasizing the pastoral landscape and the perceived peace and quiet” (Woods, 2005, p.13)
- Myth, but powerful and influential (produces in-migrants) (Woods, 2005)

Commodification:

- When an objects ‘exchange value’ (what it can be sold for) is greater than its ‘use value’ (Woods, 2005)
- A commodified object is removed from its use and valued for cultural or aesthetic reasons (Woods, 2005)

Objective 1: Overview of Ranches

Global Example of Chiapas, Mexico

- Livestock production is an important part of the developing world’s economy, and in particular, the rural economy in Chiapas (Ferguson, 2013)
- Conventional cattle ranching in the lowlands of Chiapas, Mexico (Ferguson, 2013)
 - typically employs:
 - extensive grazing,
 - annual pasture burns, and
 - frequent applications of agrochemicals.
 - threatens biodiversity and long-term productivity
- Holistic management is adopted by a small group of innovative ranchers in the Central Valleys (Ferguson, 2013)
 - Through:
 - careful land-use planning,
 - rotational grazing,
 - diversified forage, and
 - diminished use of purchased inputs.

Ranches and Conservation

- Working ranches promoted as means of conservation to: (Brunson, 2008)
 - Safeguard ecosystem services
 - Protect open space
 - Maintain traditional ranching culture

Objective 2: British Columbia and the Thompson-Nicola Regional District

Ranch Industry of British Columbia

- According to the British Columbia Cattlemen's Association (2016):
- Approx. 4,086 cattle ranches operate in BC
 - 5% of Canada's national cow herd
 - BC ranches → over 5 million acres of private land
 - Approx. 66% of the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR) is owned by ranches
 - Total economic contribution → approx. \$600 million annually

Thompson-Nicola Regional District

Thompson Nicola Regional District. (2016) :

Incorporated:

- November 24, 1967

Composition:

- 11 Municipalities
- 10 Electoral Areas

Area:

- Total 45,279 sq. kms



Image: <https://tnrd.ca/content/about-tnrd>

	Thompson-Nicola, RD British Columbia (Census division)	British Columbia (Province)
Characteristic	Total	Total
Population and dwelling counts	Total	Total
Population in 2011	128,473	4,400,057
2006 to 2011 population change (%)	5.1	7.0
Total private dwellings	59,888	1,945,365
Population density per square kilometre	2.9	4.8
Land area (square km)	44,447.71	922,509.29
Median age of the population	44.0	41.9

Statistics Canada. 2012. Thompson-Nicola, British Columbia (Code 5933) and British Columbia (Code 59) (table). Census Profile

Objective 3: Stages in the Commodification of Ranches

Introduction

- Ranches in the TNRD vary in terms of how commodified they are
- Three categories (A, B, C) have been established as rough guidelines
- Relates to Mitchell’s “Model of Creative Destruction” (2009) which has stages such as:
 - Early commodification (Private-sector investment initiated, some heritage-seekers)
 - Advanced Destruction (Deviation from heritage theme, majority post-tourists)

A. Not Commodified

The River Ranch in Merritt (within the TNRD)

- Sells Verified Beef Product
- No online presence or signs of income methods other than cattle ranching
- Therefore, the ranch can be categorized as “not commodified”

B. Semi-commodified

Black Diamond Ranch near Brookmere (within the TNRD)

- Traditional ranch income - sells eggs, chickens, turkeys, hay etc.
- Some commodification methods such as:
 - Fireside events with stargazing that has cell service and WIFI
 - Cabins and event facilities



Image: <http://www.blackdiamondranch.ca/summer>



Image: <http://www.blackdiamondranch.ca/summer>

Douglas Lake Ranch (within the TNRD)

- Canada's largest working cattle ranch
 - founded June 30, 1886
 - cattle herd → approx. 20,000 head
 - land base → more than 500,000 acres
- Use of Technology
 - In-depth Website
 - Live “Ranch Cam” on website
- Recreation
 - Fly fishing, golf and nice dining

Image: <http://www.douglaslake.com/index.html>



C. Fully Commodified

Echo Valley Ranch & Spa

- Website sells the rural idyll:
“For an additional cost you can saddle up and take a guided trail ride on one of our many beautiful horses. Learn horsemanship, or even help with the day-to-day running of our 160 acre horse ranch... the choice is yours!”



Images: <http://www.dreamscaperanch.com/home.html>

Objective 4: Recommendations for the Future of Ranches

Case Study – Cliffs of Moher, Ireland (Healy, 2016)

- Interviewed and surveyed tourists using the visitor centre
- Results:
 - high technology displays (such as virtual experiences) were *not* preferred by tourists
- Argument:
 - people’s perspectives should be emphasized throughout the planning of tourism



Image: Jepsen, L., 2014

Applied to Ranches in the TNRD

- Ranches in the TNRD are becoming increasingly more commodified as the economy changes
- Commodification includes tourism
- Further commodification can possibly lead to the “creative destruction” of ranches (Mitchell, 2009)

Proposal for moving forward:

- A bottom-up approach, that includes the opinions of the people using the commodities, should be adopted

Conclusions

- Ranching is an important industry
 - A main income source for some developing countries
 - Can be used as conservation means
 - Significant in BC and the TNRD
- There are various stages of commodification across TNRD ranches
- Commodification can lead to creative destruction
 - A bottom-up approach should be used

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